



The 'New Frontier' of Empire in the Caribbean: The Transfer of Power in British Guiana, 1961-1964

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Abstract: The vicissitudes of British imperial divestment after 1945 require scholars to explore systematically the United States' role in reshaping the contours of the British Empire. According to William Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, 'the post-war Empire was more than British and less than an imperium ... it was nationalized and internationalized as part of the Anglo-American coalition. US foreign policy after 1945 was directed not only at forging a North Atlantic coalition which would 'contain' the Warsaw Pact, but also at collaborating in the management of the political and economic changes that swept the non-European world. The history of international relations since 1945 has been defined by the 'end of empire' - whether Belgian, British, French, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, or Soviet. As each empire has disintegrated, US influence has been extended during, and through, the process of imperial disengagement. In some cases, for example the Japanese mandates acquired at the end of the Second World War, the extension of US influence led to formal control. In others, as in Jordan, Morocco, Indonesia, and the former Belgian Congo, the United States has used military and/or economic aid to fashion an 'informal empire', to borrow the term popularized by Robinson and John Gallagher. The transfer of power in British Guiana between 1961 and 1964 illustrates Louis and Robinson's claim that British imperial disengagement was managed by the Anglo-American coalition. It shows how the two powers constantly (re)negotiated the terms of their relationship in various parts of the world in order to maintain their strategic partnership. And it shows how British disengagement created the conditions for US control. In effect, the transfer of power in British Guiana was not simply the accession to office in an independent country by the nationalist elite; it also transferred control of the country's political system and economic and foreign policy to the United States. As Louis and Robinson observe, 'Kennedy's "New Frontier" began where Europe's imperial frontiers had ended.

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THE VICISSITUDES OF British imperial divestment after 1945 require scholars to explore systematically the United States's role in reshaping the contours of the British Empire. According to William Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, 'the post-war Empire was more than British and less than an imperium ... it was nationalized and internationalized as part of the Anglo-American coalition.'¹ US foreign policy after 1945 was directed not only at forging a North Atlantic coalition which would 'contain' the Warsaw Pact, but also at collaborating in the management of the political and economic changes that swept the non-European world. The history of international relations since 1945 has been defined by the 'end of empire' – whether Belgian, British, French, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, or Soviet. As each empire has disintegrated, US influence has been extended during, and *through*, the process of imperial disengagement. In some cases, for example the Japanese mandates acquired at the end of the Second World War, the extension of US influence led to formal control. In others, as in Jordan, Morocco, Indonesia, and the former Belgian Congo, the United States has used military and/or economic aid to fashion an 'informal empire', to borrow the term popularized by Robinson and John Gallagher.²

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¹ See W. R. Louis and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Decolonization', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xxii (1994), 462-511.

² J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', in J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival, and Fall of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 1-18.

the world in order to maintain their strategic partnership. And it shows how British disengagement created the conditions for US control. In effect, the transfer of power in British Guiana was not simply the accession to office in an independent country by the nationalist elite; it also transferred control of the country's political system and economic and foreign policy to the United States. As Louis and Robinson observe, 'Kennedy's "New Frontier" began where Europe's imperial frontiers had ended.'¹

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British Guiana emerged as a 'problem' in post-war Anglo-American relations in 1953, during the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration, when it held its first national election based upon universal suffrage. After the nationalist People's Progressive Party (PPP), led by Cheddi Jagan, swept the elections and escalated its challenge to British colonial rule, the colony's first popularly elected government was removed by British troops on the pretext that it was planning a Communist takeover. The Eisenhower administration endorsed the action and agreed to help to finance the colony's development in an effort to discredit the nationalist leadership.² Thus, well before John F. Kennedy took office in 1961, British Guiana had become a site for collaboration in managing the challenge of non-European nationalism to British colonial rule.

Despite their collaboration, the two powers failed to prevent the PPP from winning the general election of 1957 or to fashion a viable political alternative. At the time the Eisenhower administration left office, Jagan was expected to lead his party to victory in the elections scheduled for mid-1961. In fact, at Britain's urging, the Eisenhower administration had begun a grudging accommodation with Jagan, who recognized that he had no choice but to court Britain's goodwill.

By the time the PPP returned to office in 1957, it had moderated its political agenda and style. In 1955, the leadership split when the moderates led by Forbes Burnham broke away after a failed attempt to seize control. Jagan and his American-born wife, Janet, née Rosenberg, whom he met while a student at Northwestern University, held on to the leadership. A further split occurred when three leading left-wingers, Rory Westmaas, Sydney King, and Martin Carter, were expelled in 1957. Their expulsion, partly an attempt to placate the British, opened the way to a rapprochement with the colonial authorities in the period leading to independence.

¹ Louis and Robinson, 'Imperialism of Decolonization', p. 495.

² For US policy towards British Guiana, see C. Fraser, *Ambivalent Anti-Colonialism: The United States and the Genesis of West Indian Independence, 1940-64* (Westport, 1994). Some records pertaining to this episode at the Public Record Office have not been released and the CIA claims that its records of the covert operation it mounted in British Guiana have been destroyed. See 'CIA Destroyed Files on 1953 Iran Coup', *New York Times*, 29 May 1997.

By 1960, Britain was making preparations to hand over an independent British Guiana to the PPP.¹

The Kennedy administration, however, was less enthusiastic. According to a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report submitted to the US Intelligence Board in March 1961, Jagan might try after independence to set up 'an avowed[ly] Communist regime ... More likely ... an independent Jagan government would seek to portray itself as an instrument of reformist nationalism which would gradually move in the direction of [Fidel] Castro's Cuba. Such a regime would almost certainly be strongly encouraged and supported by Castro and the [Soviet] Bloc.' The assessment of the British as unwilling 'to interfere with political developments in British Guiana'² was seconded by Rockwood Foster, the West Indies desk officer in the state department, who visited Georgetown in February 1961, and to whom the governor admitted that Britain 'would like to get out of the business of running the country as gracefully and honorably as possible'.³ The imminence of independence left the United States wondering whether the colony would join with Cuba and challenge US influence in the Americas.

Equating the PPP and Jagan with Cuba and Castro illustrates the traumatic effect of the Cuban revolution upon US policy-makers. For the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, the revolution was an affront to US claims to leadership. Castro's repudiation, by aligning with the Soviet Union, of the quasi-colonial relationship with the United States arising out of the Spanish-American War of 1898, pointed to the fragility of the United States's informal empire in the Western Hemisphere. The radicalization of the revolution, and Cuba's decision to seek political, economic, and military support from the Communist powers, undermined US efforts to enforce the Monroe Doctrine in the Caribbean. These developments illustrated the growing weight of the Soviet Union in international affairs. US efforts since the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 to confine Soviet influence to Eastern Europe had failed to prevent the Soviet Union from penetrating an acknowledged US sphere of influence, while the fiasco at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 demonstrated the US failure to reimpose its authority over Cuba by reintegrating it into its informal Caribbean empire.

Given the perceived erosion of informal US imperial sway in the Caribbean, the transfer of power in British Guiana became of critical importance. With elections due in August 1961 to choose a government to lead the colony to independence, the Kennedy administration wished to leave Britain in no doubt of its dislike of the ties between the Jagans and Cuba.⁴

1 Memo of con., 16 Feb. 1961, *F[oreign] R[elations of the] U[nited] S[tates]*, 1961-3, xii. 513.

2 Special National Intelligence Estimate, 21 March 1961, *ibid.*, pp. 515-17.

3 Memo of con., Georgetown, 16 Feb. 1961, *ibid.*, p. 513.

4 Bowles, state dept. instruction to embassy, London, 24 March 1961 [College Park, United States

The National Security Council (NSC) proposed in May that the United States and Britain should plan a joint strategy for British Guiana. Although the British disagreed about the sort of 'reasonable government' to be put in place during the transfer of power, they were thought to be willing to take advice.¹

The divergence of views had been evident on several occasions. In April, the Americans continued to express their concerns to the British about the possibility of a Jagan victory in the elections. Kennedy had raised the issue with the prime minister, Harold Macmillan; the secretary of state, Dean Rusk, with the foreign secretary, the earl of Home; and the US ambassador at London, David Bruce, with the colonial secretary, Reginald Maudling. The British replied that they were unwilling 'to undertake any operation or permit us [the United States, to] undertake operation to prevent [a] Jagan victory'.² They assumed that Jagan was salvageable. During a visit to Washington in April 1961, Grey met with officials of the CIA, including the director, Richard Helms. Grey told his audience that 'the Jagans [were] persons with whom the British could work' and that he considered Burnham racist and untrustworthy.³ Given the resistance, Rusk, less than two weeks before the elections in British Guiana, sent a personal appeal to Home stressing that Jagan's 'accession to power would be a most troublesome setback in this Hemisphere'. Rusk again urged Home to see whether there was anything the British or Americans could do to 'forestall such an eventuality'.⁴

Rusk's letter betrayed the Kennedy administration's resentment of the British decision to support Jagan, despite its fear that he would prove to be another Castro. It ended with the veiled threat: 'I am taking the liberty of urging you to have a look because of the foreign policy ramifications of a Jagan victory. It would cause us acute embarrassments with inevitable irritations to Anglo-American relations. I do not refer in this last point to official circles but to problems of public and Congressional opinion.'⁵ Rusk's concerns about congressional opinion were not misplaced. Senator Thomas Dodd (D-Connecticut), a rabidly anti-Communist senior senator with the authority to embarrass the administration, co-authored a letter to Kennedy with Senator Ernest Gruening (R-Alaska) in which they questioned the administration's policy towards British Guiana.⁶

National Archives, Record Group 59], S[tate] D[eartment] D[ecimal] F[ile] 741D.00/3-2461.

¹ Battle to Bundy, 19 May 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 517-18.

² State dept. to Rusk (Paris), tel., 5 Aug. 1961, *ibid.*, p. 519.

³ See memo for the record, 'Visit to Washington of Sir Ralph Grey, Governor of British Guiana', 28 April 1961 [Boston], J[ohn] F[.] K[ennedy] L[ibrary], Schlesinger W[hite] H[ouse] File, box WH-3A.

⁴ State dept. to embassy, London, tel., 11 Aug. 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 519-20.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Dodd and Gruening to Kennedy, 6 Sept. 1961, JFKL, W[hite] H[ouse] C[entral] F[iles], British

Home replied on 18 August that 'the possibilities of taking action to influence the results of the election' had already been discussed, but little could be done. As the safeguards built into British Guiana's new constitution gave Britain control during the transition to independence, Home recommended working with Jagan as the best means of maintaining Western influence:

No one can say for certain how Jagan will behave if he is returned to power. He is a confused thinker and his mind is clogged with ill-digested dogma derived from Marxist literature. But he has learnt a good deal in the last eight years; he has not, since 1957, proved as difficult to deal with as he was earlier. It is true that he has during the election campaign made it clear that he expects to strengthen his relations with Cuba, and he has at times shown an interest in the possibilities of trade and aid with the Soviet bloc. But he has also, during the election, promised to seek further aid from the United States; and, if we in the West show a real willingness to try to help, we think it by no means impossible that British Guiana may end up in a position not very different from that of India.¹

As the Kennedy administration debated whether to work with Jagan as Home suggested, early in August the state department instructed the US consul general at Georgetown, Everett Melby, to monitor the fortunes of the leading opposition parties – the United Force (UF) and the People's National Congress (PNC) – and to gather information on the activities of private American groups, in particular the support that World Harvest Evangelism Inc., headed by Dr Lloyd Sweet, was giving to the UF.² Founded in 1960 by a wealthy entrepreneur of Portuguese extraction, Peter D'Aguiar, to represent the European (predominantly Portuguese) and other business groups, the UF had failed to reach agreement with Burnham's PNC, which represented the majority of the Afro-Guyanese who constituted the colony's second-largest ethnic group. Burnham's response in April 1961 to calls for closer collaboration between the PNC and the UF was to threaten to leave the party. He explained in an open letter that, 'ideologically and philosophically, there is nothing in common between the PNC and the UF'.³

The existence of political parties representing ethnic communities which distrusted each other was the distinctive feature of the election campaign. Multiracial in 1953, by 1961 the PPP was largely based in the rural Indian community of sugar workers, rice farmers, and small businessmen.

Guiana, box 43. For Dodd's attempts to influence the Kennedy administration's policy in the Congo, see R. D. Mahoney, *JFK: Ordeal in Africa* (New York, 1983), pp. 110, 146.

¹ Home to Rusk, 18 Aug. 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 521-2.

² Ball to Melby, tel., 7 Aug. 1961, JFKL, N[ational] S[ecurity] F[iles], countries, box 14A.

³ L. F. S. Burnham, letter, *Sunday Chronicle* (Guyana), 9 April 1961.

The PNC drew its support from urban areas and the working- and middle-class black communities that dominated the civil service, the teaching profession, and the service industries. The UF represented mostly middle-class and commercial groups dominated by Europeans, Christian Indians, and the Amerindian communities in which the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches enjoyed long-established influence.

Britain's aim, while working with Jagan, was to try to ensure a strong opposition to hold the PPP in check. In preparation for the elections, therefore, a British commission had redrawn the constituency boundaries to the disadvantage of the PPP, which complained about them. Nonetheless, after a bitter election campaign in which both the PNC and the UF portrayed the PPP as Communist, and in which race played the crucial role, the PPP won twenty seats, the PNC eleven, and the UF only four. With only 42 per cent of the vote, the PPP nonetheless obtained a legislative majority.

The bitter campaign exacerbated the rivalry between the leadership of the PNC and the UF. The PPP had helped to weaken the moderately socialist PNC by ordering its supporters to vote for the capitalist UF in constituencies where the PPP did not field a candidate, even though the UF was labelling the PPP as Communist.¹ The tacit collaboration demonstrated the strength of anti-black sentiment that shaped both the PPP's and the UF's electoral strategies. Although the PNC and the PPP portrayed themselves as pro-labour, the PPP supported the party of the business community rather than the party representing the black working classes. Ideological labels could not obscure the fact that electoral politics in British Guiana were based upon strategies of ethnic mobilization that did little to cement national cohesion and opened up opportunities for subsequent US intervention.

Prior to the elections, the PNC's general secretary, Sydney King, had proposed dividing British Guiana into separate electoral zones along ethnic lines. Although the party promptly expelled him, the proposal illustrates the fragmentation of the colony's political community. Similarly, after the election, D'Aguiar, in conversation with Melby, raised the possibility that the regions bordering on Venezuela and Brazil in which the UF had established itself as the majority party might secede.² The election result thus revealed the PPP's appeal to the largely rural Indian population, its lack of strong support among the other ethnic communities, and its inability to win a majority of the popular vote. It also demonstrated that the opposition parties, even with electoral boundaries redrawn in their favour,

¹ Melby to Rusk, tel., 25 Aug. 1961, JFKL, NSF, countries, box 14A.

² T. J. Spinner Jr., *A Political and Social History of Guyana, 1945-80* (Boulder, 1984), p. 79; Melby to Rusk, tel., 25 Aug. 1961, JFKL, NSF, countries, box 14A.

could not unseat the PPP. The results therefore both personally and politically vindicated Jagan and the PPP, and heightened racial tensions.

The central issue facing the PPP at home was maintaining the impetus necessary to achieve independence while presiding over a severely fractured population. The election campaign had exacerbated the bitter rivalry between the party leaders; Burnham stated his aim both to bring down the PPP government and destroy the UF and D'Aguiar. His critics saw him as the biggest obstacle to uniting the opposition and responsible for the failure to oust the PPP despite winning more votes.¹ They now feared being permanently marginalized if the country became independent under the Indian-dominated PPP.

Immediately after the PPP victory, Rusk, dismayed, asked Home to arrange a meeting in London. In addition to politics, economics, and intelligence, Rusk emphasized that he attached 'importance to the covert side': he reminded Home that Britain had agreed in June to 'have another look at what could be done in this field after the election'. Home accepted the offer to devise a joint strategy for British Guiana but, according to Rusk, warned him 'that the emphasis must be in the political and economic spheres if we are to expect rewarding dividends'.² Although the elections in British Guiana had not bridged the gap between the British and US governments about how to deal with Jagan, they agreed to try jointly to manage Britain's withdrawal from a US sphere of influence.

Although Home preferred to co-opt Jagan and the PPP, Rusk explored the alternatives. Melby returned to Washington immediately after the elections to help to shape the program – submitted to Kennedy in late August – the state department would discuss with the British. The state department recommended that the United States should offer economic and technical assistance to British Guiana; sponsor, after independence, its membership in the Organization of American States and the Alliance for Progress; and invite Jagan to meet Kennedy during a visit to the United States planned for October. At the same time, the administration should launch a covert programme to 'expose and destroy Communists in British Guiana, including, if necessary, "the possibility of finding a substitute for Jagan himself, who could command East Indian support"'. The president's special assistant, Arthur Schlesinger, commented that the two halves of the program contradicted one another and revealed the depth of the state department's distrust of both Jagan and British policy towards British Guiana.³

¹ Melby to state dept., tels. 48, 52, 25 Aug. 1961, JFKL, NSF, countries, box 14A.

² State dept. to embassy, London, tel., 26 Aug., 2 Sept. 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 522-3, 527-8.

³ Schlesinger to Kennedy, 30 Aug. 1961, *ibid.*, pp. 524-5.

After Kennedy had reviewed the program, Rusk instructed Bruce in London to go ahead with the meetings to which Home had agreed. Rusk told Bruce that although the United States was willing to try to 'salvage' Jagan, nonetheless 'it is only prudent to put out certain anchors to windward.' The administration wanted to discuss the possibility of new elections before independence, and to be assured that the governor would use his reserved powers in an emergency. The covert program should be covered with the fig leaf that the administration had yet to approve it. In supplementary instructions, Rusk explained that 'we continue to have serious reservations about British assessment [of] Jagan as set forth in London talks in April ... and in conversation here with Governor Grey ... In our view, we should keep in mind possibility [that] Jagan is Communist-controlled "sleeper" who will move to establish Castro or Communist regime upon independence.'¹

Rusk admitted that 'we have deliberately refrained up to now from intimating to British [that] we [are] prepared to try their prescription for handling Jagan. We hope this card will serve as leverage to obtain British agreement to our action program as a whole.' According to the colonial office, US officials were reluctant even to allow Jagan to visit the United States until the British government approved 'as a whole' the recommendations of the Anglo-American Working Party which met in September 1961.²

Schlesinger criticized Rusk's instructions to Bruce on the grounds that they might lead to Kennedy's policy being misconstrued. He objected to the description of Jagan as a 'sleeper' and the implication that the administration was making a less-than-sincere effort 'to tie an independent British Guiana politically and economically to [the western] hemisphere'.³ The deputy under-secretary of state for political affairs, Alexis Johnson, sought to reassure him. The state department planned to tell Bruce that 'basic to our entire program is the determination to make a college try to tie Jagan to the West'; that it was worried nonetheless about Britain's willingness 'to brush aside reports of Jagan's communist connections'.⁴

The contretemps revealed both the ambivalence within the Kennedy administration and the state department's determination to keep its options open. The United States was obsessed with ensuring that, once independent, British Guiana should be firmly tied down as a US client. Rusk ignored Home's suggestion that, under Jagan, it should be allowed to follow India's lead: non-alignment was not an acceptable status for a Carib-

¹ State dept. to embassy, London, tel., 4, 5 Sept. 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 528-9.

² Thomas to Grey, 27 Sept. 1961 [Kew, Public Record Office], F[oreign] O[ffice Records] 371/155422.

³ Schlesinger to Johnson, 7 Sept. 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 531.

⁴ Johnson to Schlesinger, 9 Sept. 1961, *ibid.*, p. 532.

bean country lest it should throw up another 'Communist' government in the Western Hemisphere.¹ Rusk was determined both to control Britain's disengagement from British Guiana and to ensure that it was securely anchored within the US sphere of influence in the Caribbean. One possible explanation of his attitude may be his awareness of the debilitating consequences of the 'Who lost China?' debate for the state department when he served as assistant secretary of state for far eastern affairs in the Truman administration. The Cuban revolution had been similarly damaging to the Republicans in the 1960 campaign, and Rusk may have begun to fear the possible political impact of an independent British Guiana under Jagan on the 1964 presidential election.

As a result of the discussions in London in September, the United States agreed to work in tandem with the British in trying to 'salvage' Jagan. The state department explained to Melby that the 'basic concept of new program is whole-hearted cross the board effort to cooperate with newly elected administration headed by Jagan and to foster effective association between British Guiana and the West'. Melby should present the policy as a recognition of British Guiana's approaching independence, not as the result of Anglo-American co-ordination; should offer development aid; and should invite Jagan to meet Kennedy during his visit to the United States in October.²

The reasons given for the decision to work with Jagan were: '(a) impracticality of any alternative cause of action; (b) dearth of effective political leadership apart from Jagan; and (c) recognition that coldness towards Jagan and withholding of aid could only accelerate his gravitation toward Soviet-Castro bloc'.³ Despite having reservations about Jagan's ideological predilections, the Kennedy administration seemed to have decided that it had little choice but to collaborate with the British in working with the PPP as British Guiana took the final steps towards independence.

Jagan himself, coached by Grey, sought to assure the Kennedy administration of his willingness to co-operate. He stated that the PPP was not Communist, promised to adhere to the rules of parliamentary democracy, and asked to join the Alliance for Progress. He left his wife – his key party organizer – out of the cabinet and, to overcome the perception of the PPP as a party of the Indian community, chose several members from other ethnic groups. Even the British Guiana Trades Union Congress (BGTUC), which opposed the PPP, stated its willingness to work with the new

¹ Neither Rusk nor his biographers acknowledge his role. See R. Rusk, *As I Saw It: By Dean Rusk As Told To Richard Rusk* (New York, 1990) and T. J. Schoenbaum, *Waging Peace and War: Dean Rusk in the Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson Years* (New York, 1988).

² Bowles to Melby, tel., 25 Sept. 1961, JFKL, NSF, countries, box 14A.

³ Bowles to US embassy, Ottawa, tel., 29 Sept. 1961, *ibid*.

government. Before leaving for the United States on 12 October, Jagan stated that he hoped to use the trip to overcome reservations about his leadership and to forge a new relationship with the United States. He did not expect his 'socialist leanings' to stand in the way, as the United States was already giving aid to Yugoslavia and Poland. It was evident that Jagan was determined to reassure the Kennedy administration that an independent British Guiana under his leadership would not constitute a threat to the United States; that the pragmatism that informed the US approach to Eastern Europe should be extended to British Guiana.¹

The Kennedy administration, too, hoped that Jagan's visit to Washington would assuage the fears of both sides: the meeting itself, followed by the carrot of US development aid, would help to bring British Guiana under the US umbrella. While Jagan hoped the aid would blunt criticism from opponents at home who painted him as Communist and anti-American, the offer of it would also vindicate the British strategy of containing US hostility to Jagan in order to open the gate to greater influence after independence.² Unfortunately for Jagan, even before he arrived in the United States it was evident that he and the state department had conflicting ideas about the scale and timing of the aid. The Kennedy administration envisaged US aid as part of a co-ordinated strategy by the Anglo-American alliance to keep British Guiana within the Western bloc, and was willing to supply only part of the aid Jagan was seeking: it was also dependent upon iron-clad guarantees that Jagan would desist from his flirtation with the Communist bloc. Jagan, on the other hand, assumed that rapprochement with the United States would open the door to Aladdin's Cave. Whereas the Kennedy administration planned to provide aid in measured amounts, Jagan was seeking immediate large-scale commitments. Rusk instructed Melby on 8 October: 'You should make every effort dispel Jagan's unrealistic expectations. It would have unfortunate effects on prospects for BG program as a whole if Jagan's hopes not deflated before his arrival here. Furthermore extravagant demands by Jagan would affect most adversely the image which we believe he wants in his own interest create in US and would impede our ability to extend assistance.' Rusk added that the United States would offer \$5 million for development, as well as a team of advisers to help to devise a 'realistic development program'.³

At a meeting on 11 October with a mission from the Agency for International Development (AID), Jagan expressed his disappointment, as he

¹ Christensen to Rusk, tel., 13 Oct.; sec. state to ARA diplomatic missions, circular tel., 4 Oct. 1961, JFKL, NSF, countries, box 14 A.

² British Guiana - 'Notes for the secretary of state's talks with the US ambassador on Wed. afternoon', 6 Sept. 1961, FO 371/155721.

³ Rusk to Melby, tel., 8 Oct. 1961, JFKL, NSF, countries, box 14 A.

had been led to believe that the United States would lend more than \$5 million if the requests were properly supported. When the AID mission refused to commit itself to an amount, Jagan concluded that his requests would be turned down; that the strategy of reaching an entente with the Kennedy administration as a way of obtaining US aid would not work.¹ As he had budgeted between \$60 and \$250 million for a development program and was looking abroad for the entire amount, Jagan, acutely disappointed, said that, given the gap between his expectations and the AID mission's offer, he would turn elsewhere. The AID mission, to whom Jagan's plans seemed to be 'grandiose and unrealistic both in amounts and in feasibility', took him to mean the Soviet Union.²

After failing with the AID mission, Jagan hoped for more success with the state department. However, it interpreted his request as showing that the assumption he was 'salvageable' was unworkable. By the time he set out for Washington seeking a rapprochement, his critics within the Kennedy administration were already trying to obtain a decision to oust him.³ The visit satisfied neither side. Jagan explained that after independence British Guiana would preserve its democratic system and seek membership in the Organization of American States, but its foreign policy would be non-aligned. He also acknowledged his belief in economic planning by the state, though he played it down at his meeting with Kennedy.⁴ Although Jagan's unwillingness to embrace an anti-Communist strategy unsettled the administration,⁵ Kennedy was not reflexively hostile to trade between British Guiana and the Communist bloc, merely anxious that commercial ties should not lead to political dependence. He mentioned that the United States itself traded with Communist countries and gave aid to Yugoslavia, India, and Brazil.⁶

Despite AID's recommendation that the administration should offer British Guiana \$5 million in aid and not worry that Jagan would seek additional sums from other countries, including the Soviet Union, he left Washington empty-handed.⁷ The Kennedy administration merely offered to send an economic mission to Georgetown to help the PPP to draft applications for aid. Jagan understood that he had failed. When he asked

¹ Melby to Rusk, tel., 11, 12 Oct. 1961, JFKL, NSF, countries, box 14A.

² USAID position paper, Jagan's visit to Washington, 23-25 Oct. 1961: 'Economic Assistance to British Guiana', 17 Oct. 1961, *ibid.*

³ Memo, Hilsman to Johnson, 17 Oct. 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 534-6.

⁴ Memo of con., 25 Oct. 1961: Subject: 'Call of Premier Jagan of British Guiana on the President', *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 536-8.

⁵ See Spinner, *Guyana*, pp. 83-5 and A. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), pp. 773-9.

⁶ Memo of con., 25 Oct. 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 536-8.

⁷ 'Economic Assistance to British Guiana', JFKL, NSF, countries, box 14A.

Schlesinger to explain Kennedy's unwillingness, however, Schlesinger replied disingenuously that the administration merely wished to examine the colony's development plan, and added that the administration 'definitely was not stalling'.¹

Although the Kennedy administration postponed the decision whether to give development aid to British Guiana, it had not yet decided to overthrow the PPP government. In November 1961, in an interview with the Russian newspaper, *Izvestia*, Kennedy stated that the United States could live with Marxist-led governments that came to power through fair elections.² As he cited Jagan's victory in British Guiana, the statement implied that Kennedy had not publicly committed himself to overthrow its government. He further showed his willingness to work with Jagan by authorizing in January 1962 \$1.5 million more in technical assistance to the colony and by asking for the promised economic mission to be sent by 15 February.³

This decision followed a meeting between the state department and AID officials on 11 January which exemplified the tussle being waged within the Kennedy administration. AID had decided not to fund a road-building project in British Guiana. Whereas the state department saw the project as an important symbol of the United States's willingness to work with Jagan, it saw AID's decision not to fund it as an attempt to abort the strategy.⁴

Meanwhile, in Britain, by late 1961 the colonial office was hoping to persuade the United States to take more responsibility for Britain's colonial territories.⁵ The foreign office, which agreed, recommended that Macmillan should raise the issue with Kennedy when they met in December at Bermuda. The foreign office aimed at an exchange of responsibilities: whereas Britain would play a larger role in Latin America, the United States would take over some of Britain's responsibilities to the Commonwealth.⁶ As Britain envisaged wider Anglo-American collaboration, its policies towards British Guiana were directed at minimizing the impact of the colony's troubles:

The Americans have made clear that they would welcome contributions from this country to their Latin American programmes in order that this should not appear to be exclusively American and so be prejudiced in Latin American eyes. We cannot respond as favourably to this appeal as we would wish because of our commitments in the Commonwealth. But it would obviously be easier for us to do so if a

1 Hennings to Maudling, 27 Oct. 1961, FO 371/155724; memo of con., 26 Oct. 1961, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 538-40.

2 Transcript of interview granted by Kennedy to Soviet Government News Agency, *New York Times*, 29 Nov. 1961.

3 Kennedy to Hamilton, 12 Jan. 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 542.

4 Schlesinger to Kennedy, 12 Jan. 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 540-1.

5 Williams, with encls., to Hutchinson, 18 Dec. 1961, FO 371/155731.

6 Bermuda Meeting - Dec. 1961, West Indies/Latin America, supp. brief by FO, FO 371/155731.

larger share of the Commonwealth load could be borne by the Americans. It would be useful if this point could be made in discussions at Bermuda. Our ultimate aim would be to achieve an understanding with the Americans under which they took over more of our Commonwealth commitments and we took over a corresponding share of theirs in Latin America: but such a plan cannot be adopted until the agreement of other Government departments has been obtained.

Events in British Guiana disrupted the British plans. In February 1962, the opposition parties decided on a test of strength owing to their fear of becoming independent under PPP rule. The PPP budget, drafted by the Cambridge economist Nicholas Kaldor, called for compulsory savings and higher taxes. In response, the PNC, the BGTUC, and the UF together backed a general strike on 16 February to force revisions to the budget, but which appeared to be an attempt to bring down the government. When the strike led to riots and arson in Georgetown, partly owing to police resentment of the government, British troops in the colony, supported by others from Jamaica and Britain, were used to restore calm, after the police proved unable to contain the riots and a senior police officer was killed by gunfire.¹ Although the government responded by withdrawing several of the provisions to which its critics had objected, Jagan also planned to set up an internal security force under PPP control to serve as a counterweight to the predominantly black police.² The racial polarization manifest during the election was intensifying the political crisis.

The crisis provided the first evidence of US co-ordination of the anti-PPP forces in an attempt to create an effective alternative to Jagan. The state department acknowledged that individual Americans and US organizations had been involved. But when Maudling asked whether the CIA had also been involved, he was assured by Schlesinger that it had not.³ The reply may have been intended to mislead. On the day of the disturbances, the acting deputy assistant secretary for Europe, William Burdett, invited the British chief of chancery, Dennis Greenhill, and the colonial attaché, John Hennings, to the state department and asked them for their 'assessment of the current situation and UK views on the broader implications for the future of the colony'. He asked whether the British decision to send in troops meant that Britain planned to suspend the constitution; whether the PNC and the UF might make an alliance; whether the Jagan government might fall owing to the budget; and whether the disturbances would affect Britain's timetable for independence.⁴ Hennings reported to

¹ Grey to Maudling, 14 Feb. 1962, FO 371/161948; same to same, 15 Feb. 1962, FO 371/161947.

² Grey to Maudling, 20 Feb. 1962, FO 371/161947.

³ Paper prepared in the state dept., 15 March 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 558; memo, Schlesinger to Bruce, 1 March 1962, *ibid.*, pp. 550-1.

⁴ Memo of con., 16 Feb. 1962, SDDF 741D.00/2-1662.

the colonial office that 'the events of the past week provided a convenient excuse to enable the Administration to get off the hook of a policy, which from the point of internal American politics had never been anything but highly unpopular.'¹ Although Burdett's questions may have been designed to elicit the level of British commitment to Jagan, the fact that he asked them within hours of the confrontation suggests that he may not have been surprised by what happened.

Burdett had tried to shape events in British Guiana before the crisis occurred. In a secret telegram in October 1961, he told Melby that Richard Ishmael, the president of the BGTUC and the leader of the official union of sugar workers, the Man Power Citizens' Association (MPCA), was seeking the AFL-CIO's support in the struggle against the 'Jaganite Communist threat', and added that the 'department feels best route for helping BG labor probably through international free trade union movement'.² Burdett knew several months ahead both that the opposition was gearing up for a confrontation with the PPP government and who might support them.

In the wake of the disturbances, Jagan claimed that the UF and a section of the business community had conspired to bring down the government and, in a meeting with Melby, accused the United States of involvement.³ There is tantalizing evidence that he may have been right – that the state department and/or the CIA were involved, notwithstanding the Kennedy administration's disclaimer. The *New York Times* reported in 1967 that the CIA had 'helped organize strikes in 1962 and 1963 against Dr Cheddi Jagan', and named the US branch of the Public Service International (PSI), based in London, as the channel for the aid.⁴ The London *Sunday Times* subsequently carried a report naming an American, Howard McCabe, as the PSI's key operative in British Guiana.⁵ Melby reported on 20 February 1962 that 'William' McCabe, affiliated with PSI, had called at the consulate that afternoon to dispel the rumours of 'American labor agitators'. McCabe told Melby that his visit had been planned for several weeks and that he had come to advise the British Guiana Civil Service Association in its negotiations with the government. Grey told the colonial office, on the strength of information given him by Melby, that the PSI was represented by Howard MacKay.⁶ Whatever his name, the fact that he represented the PSI in Georgetown during the riots suggests that the CIA were involved, and used the PSI to channel the help Burdett had offered.

¹ Hennings to Thomas, 22 Feb. 1962, FO 371/161952.

² Burdett to Melby, 10 Oct. 1961, SDDF 841D.062/10-1061.

³ Melby to Rusk, tel., 21 Feb. 1962, SDDF 741D.00/2-2162.

⁴ 'CIA Men Aided Strikes in Guiana against Dr Jagan', *New York Times*, 22 Feb. 1967.

⁵ 'How the CIA Got Rid of Jagan', *Sunday Times*, 16 April 1967.

⁶ Melby to Rusk, 19 Feb. 1962, SDDF 811.062/2-1962; Grey to Maudling, 20 Feb. 1962, FO 371/161948.

The crisis ended the possibility of a US accommodation with Jagan, because within days the state department was assuming that Jagan's suspicions of the United States made one impracticable. The British ambassador at Washington, Sir David Ormsby Gore, reported on 19 February that Kennedy, the previous day, had 'hoped that these [events] might enable us to reconsider the date of independence and also the possibility of requiring a further general election before independence was finally granted'.¹ The same day, Rusk suggested to Home that the United States and Britain should re-examine the premise 'that there was no reasonable alternative to working with Jagan', because he had 'reached the conclusion that it is not possible for us to put up with an independent British Guiana under Jagan'. Home did as Rusk asked. In a minute for the cabinet of 21 February, the foreign office proposed that Britain should appease the United States by agreeing to discuss the possibility of holding new elections in British Guiana before independence. Thus, the disturbances set the stage for the re-evaluation of both US and British policy at the prompting of the CIA with the collusion of the state department.²

Although Rusk claimed that Jagan and 'persons closely associated with him' had Communist connections, he admitted that he was bowing before the pressure of US public opinion.³ The antipathy to Jagan ran deeply among members of Congress, the CIA, and labour union officials: the state department, which received 113 Congressional letters and 2,400 letters from the general public expressing opposition to Jagan, wondered whether labour unions, companies with investments in British Guiana, and right-wing groups would oppose the administration if it continued to work with him.⁴ Even before his visit to the United States in October 1961, Dodd and Gruening had written to Kennedy to oppose World Bank loans for British Guiana. Congressman John H. Rousselot had cabled Kennedy in November 1961 to 'go on record as being unswervingly opposed to aid of any kind to Cheddi Jagan and his Marxist-Socialist-Communist Government'.⁵ He was echoed by Congresswoman Edna Kelly.⁶ Earlier, Rousselot had called on Kennedy to endorse D'Aguiar in the general election, which Jagan described as intervention in the colony's internal affairs. That Kelly

¹ Ormsby Gore to FO, tel., 19 Feb. 1962, FO 371/161947 A10110/27.

² Hankey, minute 'British Guiana', 21 Feb. 1962, FO 371/161947. Schlesinger indicated in 1994 that 'the British thought that we were overreacting, and indeed we were. The CIA decided this was some great menace, and they got the bit between their teeth': T. Weiner, 'A Kennedy-CIA Plot Returns to Haunt Clinton', *New York Times*, 20 Oct. 1994.

³ State dept. to embassy, London, tel., 19 Feb. 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 544-5.

⁴ Paper prepared in the state dept., 15 March 1962, *ibid.*, pp. 555-8.

⁵ Dodd and Gruening to Kennedy, 6 Sept. 1961, Rousselot to Kennedy, 6 Nov. 1961, JFKL, WHCF, box 43.

⁶ O'Brien to Kelly, 7 Nov. 1961, *ibid.*

and Dodd were Democrats, whereas Rousselot and Gruening were Republicans, attests to the bipartisan antipathy towards Jagan, which was serious enough to jeopardize aid to other countries. Congress even criticized the AID mission sent to determine whether British Guiana was eligible for US aid, and was only placated with the explanation that the mission's purpose was to facilitate the entry of CIA agents into British Guiana.¹ Once anti-Communist hysteria closed the avenues for debate about Jagan within the Kennedy administration, the CIA was determined to undermine him.

Home saw little reason for Rusk's push to get rid of Jagan, nor for Britain to single out British Guiana for special treatment, given the other colonies in which plans for Britain's withdrawal had led to political crisis. He reminded Rusk that owing to the US advocacy of decolonization, 'premature independence' was a gift that had been handed to the 'Communists'.² The British, who preferred to deal with Jagan than with Burnham, saw little chance of his government being unseated in another election. They reminded Rusk that Jagan was little more than a tea-party socialist or, in Iain MacLeod's words, 'a naïve London School of Economics Marxist filled with charm, personal honesty, and juvenile nationalism'.³ During his visit to the United States, Jagan had acknowledged in a conversation at Schlesinger's home that he and his government believed in socialism 'but they are democratic socialists'.⁴ The British were impatient with US pressure to solve a problem that had its roots in US domestic politics. Maudling explained that as Britain wished to withdraw from British Guiana as expeditiously as possible, it would be happy to see the United States take over the responsibility.⁵

Notwithstanding the British response, both the state department and the CIA were of the view that 'a firm decision had been taken to get rid of the Jagan government'.⁶ However, Kennedy wanted to ensure that the British would co-operate and, on 8 March, he told Rusk:

No final decision will be taken on our policy to British Guiana and the Jagan government until (a) the Secretary of State has a chance to discuss the matter with Lord Home in Geneva, and (b) Hugh Fraser [under-secretary for the colonies] completes his on-the-spot survey in British Guiana for the Colonial Office. The questions which we must answer before we reach our decision include the following: 1. Can Great Britain be persuaded to delay independence for a year? 2.

¹ Interview of Hamilton by Bayel, 18 Aug. 1964, JFKL, Oral History Project.

² Home to Rusk, 26 Feb. 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 546-8.

³ Memo, Schlesinger to Bruce, 27 Feb. 1962, *ibid.*, p. 549.

⁴ R. J. Alexander, *Presidents, Prime Ministers, and Governors of the English-Speaking Caribbean and Puerto Rico: Conversations and Correspondence* (Westport, 1997), pp. 205-9.

⁵ Memo, Schlesinger to Bruce, 27 Feb. 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 549.

⁶ Memo, Schlesinger to Kennedy, 8 March 1962, *ibid.*, p. 548.

If Great Britain refuses to delay the date of independence, would a new election before independence be possible? If so, would Jagan win or lose? If he lost, what are the alternatives? 3. What are the possibilities and limitations of United States action in the situation?¹

The meeting between Rusk and Home in Geneva in March 1962 set the stage for the British government's abandonment of Jagan. According to Rusk, Home acknowledged that 'Britain must not leave behind another Castro situation in the hemisphere.' Britain, therefore, would set up a commission of inquiry to study the causes of the recent disorders in British Guiana which would postpone independence and 'muddy [the] situation sufficiently to reopen Britain's present commitments as to schedule'.² Rusk reported that, although Home was not yet ready to agree to covert action, he did agree that such action might become necessary. Home had decided to give way to the US demand for a compliant government in British Guiana as long as Britain controlled the timing and the tactics. Jagan's fate was sealed.

In a meeting with state department and White House officials on 16 March following his tour of British Guiana, Hugh Fraser explained that because of the racial polarization between the Indian and African communities, he was thinking of introducing constitutional protection for the rights of minorities and perhaps proportional representation. He reiterated the view that Jagan was not a Communist, and suggested that politically he was now so weak that US aid would tie the colony to the West. His audience disagreed. Johnson reminded Fraser that the United States viewed events in British Guiana through the prism of its experience in Cuba: 'Castro had originally been presented as a reformer. We do not intend to be taken in twice.' White House assistants Ralph Dungan and Schlesinger stressed the domestic influences on US foreign policy: aid to Jagan would jeopardize the administration's foreign aid bill, but prospects would improve 'if some other figure were to arise as the leader of British Guiana'.³

In suggesting that the United States should work with Jagan, Fraser, who spoke for the colonial office, was apparently unaware of Home's agreement with Rusk, of which few other officials may have known. The national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy, referred in March 1964 to the agreement in a memorandum to President Lyndon B. Johnson. In 1967, the London *Sunday Times* disclosed that the British government had sanctioned the CIA's activities in British Guiana in 1963, although only Macmillan; the colonial secretary, Duncan Sandys, who had replaced

¹ National Security Action memo, no. 135, Kennedy to Rusk, 8 March 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 551.

² Rusk to state dept., tel., 13 March 1962, *ibid.*, p. 553.

³ Memo of con., 17 March 1962, *ibid.*, pp. 558-64.

Maudling in August 1962; and the head of the British security service, were privy.¹ The Geneva meeting set the stage for a co-ordinated covert action programme to force Jagan from office.

Immediately after the meeting between Home and Rusk, the work to remove Jagan gained momentum. In March 1962, Burdett paid a visit to British Guiana during which he met a cross-section of opinion, including members of the PPP, the opposition parties and the PNC's leader, Burnham, and influential members of the private sector. Grey, in a meeting with Burdett and Melby, said that Jagan 'would make a real effort obtain economic aid from Soviet bloc'.² No further evidence was needed by the Kennedy administration to justify its stance towards British Guiana and search for someone to replace Jagan.

When Burnham visited the United States in May 1962 to attend the United Nations, he was invited to the state department.³ And although Schlesinger prevented him from meeting Kennedy, he met with Dodd, who communicated to Kennedy the substance of their conversation. It centred on the possibilities of provoking a split in the PPP and creating an anti-Jagan coalition that could win new elections before independence. In the wake of the unrest in February, Burnham had suggested to Grey that Jagan might resign, to be replaced by the minister of home affairs, Balram Singh Rai, with PNC support.⁴

During Burnham's meeting with Schlesinger and senior state department officials on 3 May, he explained that the opposition parties in British Guiana were demanding proportional representation and that everyone, including the PPP, recognized that new elections would have to be held before independence. Two days later, he met Johnson over lunch with Teodoro Moscoso, the US co-ordinator for the Alliance for Progress; the deputy assistant secretary for international affairs in the labour department, Harry Weiss; Schlesinger; Richard Goodwin, a White House assistant; and Serafino Romualdi of the AFL-CIO.⁵

Burnham's visit to Washington confirmed his status as the preferred alternative to Jagan. According to Burdett, 'Burnham was unemotional and precise and made a good impression.'⁶ Although the administration wondered whether supporting him might be construed as anti-Indian

1 See memo for president, 2 March 1964, memos of Bundy to Johnson, 1963-6 [Frederick, Md.], University Press of America, microfilm, reel 1, memos of the special asst. for national security affairs; 'Macmillan, Sandys Backed CIA's Anti-Jagan Plot', *Sunday Times*, 23 April 1967.

2 'Jagan Agrees He Fits Description of a Red', *New York Times*, 23 June 1962; Melby to Rusk, tel., 27 March 1962, SDDF 741D.00/3-2662.

3 Memo of con., 3 May 1962, SDDF 741D.00/5-362.

4 Grey to Rusk, tel., 19 Feb. 1962, FO 371/161947.

5 Memo of con., 3 May 1962, SDDF 741D.00/5-362; memo of con., 5 May 1962, SDDF 741D.00/5-562.

6 Burdett to embassy, London, tel., 7 May 1962, SDDF 741D.00/5-7627.

sentiment,¹ the high-profile opposition to the Jagans of Ishmael, the Indo-Guyanese leader of the MPCA, provided evidence that the anti-Jagan coalition was not anti-Indian, as did Rai's participation in the anti-Jagan manoeuvres.

Not everyone was convinced of Burnham's suitability. Harry Hoffman, a member of the long-awaited economic mission which was conducting its study of the political and economic situation, remarked that 'there is considerable feeling here, which I am inclined to share, that British Guiana would be worse off with Burnham than with Jagan.'² However prescient, such sceptical assessments were drowned out in the rush to find an alternative. The administration soon decided that Rai – the possible alternative as leader of the Indian community – was unlikely to defeat Jagan in an election. That left Burnham. In September 1962, Dodd complained to Rusk that the state department was reluctant to authorize a housing project in British Guiana to be financed by the United States for the benefit of Burnham, who should be given credit for his role in obtaining US scholarships for British Guyanese students. Dodd, keen to buttress Burnham's political stature, volunteered to issue a statement affirming Burnham's role in the scholarship program.³

The US trade union movement also backed Burnham. In 1961, Romualdi, whose antipathy to Jagan had been evident from the early 1950s, had become the director of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), an organization funded by the US government through AID to train pro-American trade union officials in foreign countries. In September 1962, he reported that 'the trade union movement in British Guiana – supported by the ORIT-ICFTU, and most emphatically by their US affiliates – rejects the theory that there is no alternative to the regime of Dr Jagan.' Similarly, the vice-president of the AFL-CIO, William C. Doherty, wrote to the US vice-president, Lyndon Johnson, to express support for Burnham and urge the state department and AID to give scholarships and loans for housing to the anti-Jagan forces in British Guiana. According to Doherty, 'Mr Burnham and the PNC represent the democratic movement in British Guiana and I am most anxious to assist in achieving their legitimate objectives.'⁴ Thus, the choice of Burnham as the alternative to Jagan was endorsed by a wide range of people with close ties to the Kennedy administration.

The British followed suit. In June 1962, Macmillan told Kennedy that

¹ Dutton to Johnson, 20 July 1962, SDDF 741D.00/6-2662.

² Memo, Schlesinger to Kennedy, 21 June 1962, *FRUS, 1962-3*, xii. 572-3.

³ Dodd to Rusk, 17 Sept. 1962, JFKL, WHCF, British Guiana, box 236.

⁴ Report, 'More about Cheddi Jagan', Romualdi, 17 Sept. 1962, JFKL, Schlesinger WH Files, writings, box W-3; Doherty to Johnson, 21 June 1962, SDDF 741D.00/6-2662.

the British had decided to rethink their timetable for independence for British Guiana, and would 'try to persuade the leaders of the political parties to agree that elections should be held before the territory becomes independent. This will give us a little more time and also, perhaps a further opportunity to establish whether, under a democratic system, there is any alternative to Dr Jagan's government.' Here was a clear endorsement by the British government of Home's agreement with Rusk.¹

Although key members of the White House staff remained unconvinced, Kennedy, too, had signed on to Rusk's plan. Bundy and Schlesinger agreed with the state department's reasoning about the need to force Jagan from office, but wondered whether the CIA 'knows how to manipulate an election without a backfire' and whether Rusk would be able to persuade the British to back the US plans.² Kennedy, however, had told Ormsby Gore in late July that he was glad that Britain was going to press for new elections, which 'would provide opportunity for government of different complexion to come into power through democratic processes'. He added that the assessment of projects to be financed by US development would continue, to ensure that the preliminary work would be done 'by the time a new government comes to power in B[ritish] G[uiana]'.³

The British government, for its part, had kept Home's promise that the commission of inquiry would be used to slow and redirect the transfer of power. It postponed the conference on independence for British Guiana from May to October pending the commission's report. On 10 September, Maudling's successor, Duncan Sandys, suggested to Macmillan how they might unseat Jagan's PPP government. The conference should be 'allowed to break down over the issue of proportional representation and certain other matters on which the parties are disagreed'. The colony's leaders would be recommended to open talks at home with the expectation that they, too, would fail. Sandys would then propose a referendum on proportional representation which the opposition parties were likely to win; new elections would have to be held; and after the elections, the conference would reconvene. Sandys told Macmillan that the 'Americans should be informed in strictest confidence of this plan, so that they may give such support as they think fit to Burnham'.⁴

Macmillan told Ormsby Gore to tell Kennedy of the plan in confidence, including the possibility that Sandys might invite Burnham to head a government to conduct the referendum. 'Please impress on the President that no one at all knows of this plan and that it will be quite disastrous if it

¹ State dept. to embassy, London, tel., 7 June 1962, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 569-71.

² Memo, Bundy to Kennedy, 13 July, memo, Schlesinger to Dungan, 19 July 1962, *ibid.*, pp. 577-8.

³ State dept. to embassy, London, draft tel., n.d., *ibid.*, p. 579.

⁴ Minute, Sandys to Macmillan, 10 Sept. 1962, FO 371/161957.

were to leak out.¹ By endorsing the Kennedy administration's choice of Burnham as the leader of independent Guyana, Sandys' plan showed that British Guiana was passing from 'formal' colonial rule under the British into the 'informal' US empire in the Caribbean. It showed how the New Frontier supplanted Britain's sway over the West Indian territories.

Britain's deference to the United States became more evident during Burnham's second visit to Washington in early September 1962, to explore US support for a possible PNC-PPP coalition government. He had discussed this with Grey, who warned Ormsby Gore, who in turn asked the state department to warn Burnham that the United States would refuse aid to any government which included Jagan. Burnham was left with no choice but the UF. He told the state department on 14 September that under proportional representation, the PNC and UF would win a majority and form a coalition government.² Thus, the Macmillan government and the Kennedy administration closed the door to the only government likely to keep the simmering racial tension under control by denying the PPP a role commensurate with its share of the popular vote.

The extent of Jagan's isolation had become evident in the hearings in May and June before the commission of inquiry (Sir Henry Wynn Parry, chair, Sir Edward Asafu-Adjaye of Ghana, and G. D. Khosla of India). During his testimony, Jagan acknowledged his admiration for Castro and Nikita Khrushchev and admitted that he could be considered a Communist, but he also stated that he had no intention of copying Castro's policies.³ The testimony, which confirmed the British assessment of Jagan as naïve, was used against him with telling effect: Dodd inserted it into the Congressional Record along with praise of the administration for refusing aid. The commission, which released its report in early October, attributed the riots to the fear of Communist tendencies on the part of the PPP government. The report minimized the significance of racial tensions and dismissed the idea of a plot to overthrow the government: the unrest 'was comparable to an act of spontaneous combustion when some highly fermented substance is subjected to long pressures. The mass of discontented and idle workers on strike was inexorably driven by the sheer force of bored monotony to find release in rowdiness and rioting.'⁴ Thus, the report 'muddled the situation'. It contradicted Fraser, who had emphasized the ethnic tensions, and obscured the role of the CIA. It not only delayed the plans for inde-

¹ Macmillan to Ormsby Gore, tel., personal, n.d., FO 371/161957.

² Grey to Piper, 2 Oct. 1962, FO 371/161958; memo of con., 7 Sept. 1962, SDDF 741D.00/9-762; memo of con., 14 Sept. 1962, SDDF 741D.00/9-1462.

³ Melby to state dept., tel., 8 July 1962, SDDF 741D.00/7-862.

⁴ 'Report of a commission of inquiry into disturbances in British Guiana in Feb. 1962', Colonial No. 354 (London, 1962), pp. 60-2.

pendence, as Home had promised Rusk, but also made Jagan's willingness to seek ties with the Communist countries the central issue in determining the future of the colony.

Even before the report's release, Kennedy and Home met in Washington in September to discuss Anglo-American co-operation against the 'Communist' threat in the Caribbean. Home revealed that Britain was unwilling to impose restrictions on British trade with Cuba, but admitted that Jagan's decision to increase economic and political ties with Cuba was a cause for concern. He agreed that Britain would help in 'patrolling of the Caribbean against the movement of arms or agents from Cuba, particularly in the direction of British Guiana'.¹ The meeting had included Rusk, the under-secretary, George Ball, Ormsby Gore, and Bruce. It would seem that one objective of the meeting was to agree upon Sandys' plan as the basis for joint policy towards British Guiana.

When British Guiana's political leaders arrived in London for the postponed talks about independence on 23 October, the PPP demanded a timetable: the PNC and UF, now co-operating, demanded elections under proportional representation prior to independence. After two weeks of deadlock, the talks were broken off, and Sandys announced that they would resume in Georgetown with Grey in the chair; that, unless some agreement were reached, the British government would impose a solution.² His plan to deadlock the conference had worked to perfection. The claim of the PPP, now paralysed, to being the most effective successor to British colonial rule and its ability to govern were being undermined; the forces arrayed against it were made up of the opposition parties which represented a majority of the population, the Kennedy administration, and the British government. In agreeing to participate in talks chaired by Grey, the PPP government was tacitly admitting its need for British support and agreement with the opposition parties. It was unlikely to be given either, as its opponents knew that its days in office were numbered. Nonetheless, the PPP refused to resign and pave the way for elections.

In March 1963, Bundy, in an attempt to keep up the pressure on Britain to oust Jagan, asked Ormsby Gore to clarify Britain's policy in British Guiana.³ When Sandys replied that Britain was not yet ready to break the political deadlock, the state department told Hennings that it would discuss British Guiana with Harold Wilson, the leader of the Labour Party, when he visited Washington in March.⁴ The Kennedy administration was

¹ 'President Meets with Lord Home on Curbing Cuba', *New York Times*, 1 Oct. 1962.

² 'Parley on Guiana Ends in Deadlock', *New York Times*, 7 Nov. 1962. For the text of the press release, see FO 371/161959.

³ Ormsby Gore to FO, tel., 15 March 1963, FO 371/167689.

⁴ FO to embassy, Washington, tel., 27 March, Killick to Slater, 20 March 1963, *ibid.*

taking steps, which proved successful, to ensure that if Labour won the next election in Britain, it would stick by Sandys' plan. In the meantime, however, it had to keep the Conservatives up to the mark.

In late March, the PPP had introduced a Labour Relations Bill, patterned on the Wagner Act in the United States, which allowed for balloting by workers to determine union representation.¹ Although ostensibly intended to settle recognition disputes, the bill's immediate aim was to replace the MPCA – a major source of support for the opposition parties whose ties with British and US trades unions enabled it to function as a conduit to Jagan's opponents overseas – with the PPP-controlled Guyana Industrial and Agricultural Workers' Union (GAWU), as the dominant group in the BGTUC. The anti-PPP coalition countered by calling a general strike obeyed by most of the unions which they controlled, including the Civil Service Association to which most senior civil servants belonged. In the sugar industry, employers imposed a lockout which effectively prevented PPP supporters from demonstrating their opposition to the strike. Except for essential services, the colony was effectively crippled. US and British trade unions reportedly helped to finance the strike to the tune of \$50,000 to \$70,000 per week, the AIFLD sent organizers to help coordinate activity, and, as in February 1962, the Public Service International, allegedly a CIA front, was also reportedly involved.² The level of Anglo-American support for the anti-PPP forces undoubtedly reflected the participation of both the British and US intelligence services, as the two most senior British security officials, together with Sandys and Macmillan, had authorized the CIA's activities.

On 9 May, the governor, at Jagan's request, declared a state of emergency. Jagan also offered his resignation on condition that elections were held under the existing electoral system and that independence be given to the winner, demands that he knew would find few takers. He then turned to Cuba and the Soviet Union for food and fuel, and in order to store the fuel Cuba supplied, took over the storage facilities of the Shell Oil Company, after the state department refused to allow the fuel to be stored at the airport in an area leased to the United States in 1940.³

Although it is unclear whether the Cuban-Soviet aid which arrived in mid-June prompted Britain's efforts to negotiate an end to the strike, the Kennedy administration left the British in no doubt that it saw the aid as a

¹ Jagan, 'Letter to the Editor', *New York Times*, 28 June 1963.

² 'Guiana Labor Uneasy', *New York Times*, 7 July 1963; 'CIA men Aided Strikes in Guiana against Dr Jagan', *New York Times*, 22 Feb. 1967; Romualdi to Dungan, 19 July 1963, JFKL, WHCF, box 43. In this letter, Romualdi revealed that, after his visit to British Guiana in April 1962, AIFLD decided to extend support to the anti-Jagan BGTUC.

³ '7 Shell Oil Tanks Seized by Guiana', *New York Times*, 23 June 1963.

harbinger of greater Cuban and Soviet involvement in British Guiana after independence.¹ On 29 June, Britain sent a trade union official, Robert Willis, to Georgetown to mediate. The anti-PPP unions only agreed to mediation, however, when it became clear that their foreign aid was in jeopardy. The PPP, on the other hand, had raised a US\$1 million loan from its own commercial arm which had contracted to supply railway sleepers and other goods to Cuba. When the British government approved the loan, the Kennedy administration, which objected, urged them to reconsider. The foreign office replied that it had no power to prevent it, as the loan had not been contracted by the government but by the PPP's commercial arm. In addition, under the terms of the 1961 constitution conferring internal self-government on British Guiana, the governor lacked the constitutional authority to block the transaction.²

Whatever the reasons for the settlement, the strike caused a serious disagreement between the Macmillan government and the Kennedy administration, which was offended at the sight of Cuban and Russian ships bringing supplies to British Guiana under the protection of elite British troops. They were also upset when Sandys told the house of commons on 19 June that 'the struggle is now more political than industrial and it has become clear that the two sides are evenly balanced.' To the Kennedy administration, the statement was 'not only a misrepresentation of the nature of the strike, but illustrates the unwillingness of the UK to cope with the Jagan Government'. The differences in approach had become 'a major policy issue between the United States and Great Britain', and Kennedy, who was due to meet Macmillan in Britain in late June, viewed 'British Guiana as the most important topic he has to discuss'.³

Rusk told Bruce to warn the British that Kennedy attached great importance to 'reaching understanding with UK on British Guiana. This is principal subject President intends raise with Macmillan at Birch Grove and is main reason for my talks in London with Home and Sandys.' As the United States did not want Britain to transfer power without first removing Jagan from office, Rusk claimed that Macmillan was reneging on the agreement to remove him and had 'reverted to view UK should wash its hands of British Guiana by granting early independence, leaving the mess on our doorstep'. For this reason, Home should take part in the planned talks, as British Guiana was 'not just a colonial problem but one with the highest foreign policy implications'.

As the United States expected to determine the conduct of the British as

¹ 'Guiana's Labor Uneasy', *New York Times*, 7 July 1963.

² FO to embassy, Washington, tel., 24 July 1963, FO 374/167689.

³ Memo for the record, with attachment, 21 June 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 604-5.

well as the British Guyanese government, Rusk told Bruce to ensure that the Labour Party's leaders backed the US goals in British Guiana prior to their expected return to power.¹ As Bundy put it the next year, Harold Wilson 'should be told as clearly as Douglas Home was that the US cannot accept another Communist state in this hemisphere. He expects to hear this, and has said that he will be able to meet us pretty well.'² When Labour's foreign secretary, Patrick Gordon Walker, visited Washington in October, he was expected to agree to the continuation of the Sandys plan. In July 1965, in an even more pointed reference to the collaboration, a state department memorandum explained to Rusk the purpose of a meeting requested by the foreign office: 'Sir Patrick [Gordon Walker] is expected to advise you officially that the British government agrees to authorize continued covert assistance to the anti-Jagan parties in British Guiana ... He may also express the hope that the cooperation now existing between our intelligence services will be continued.'³ British Guiana had become an avenue through which joint Anglo-American intelligence and covert activities were being institutionalized.

At the meeting between Kennedy and Macmillan in June 1963, Britain explained that it was reluctant to resume direct rule over British Guiana because it would be expected to do the same in Southern Rhodesia. While willing to introduce proportional representation and to transfer power to a Burnham-D'Aguiar government, Britain required a guarantee of unequivocal US support if it reimposed direct rule to facilitate the removal of Jagan. Kennedy feared that Jagan's survival might determine the outcome of the next presidential election:

The great danger in 1964 was that, since Cuba would be the major American public issue, adding British Guiana to Cuba could well tip the scales, and someone would be elected who would take military action against Cuba. He said that the American people would not stand for a situation which looked as though the Soviet Union had leaptfrogged over Cuba to land on the continent in the Western Hemisphere.⁴

The meeting resolved the differences between the United States and Britain, and allowed them to proceed with the Sandys plan as the basis of the joint strategy to oust Jagan. Upon his return to the United States, Kennedy therefore announced in a letter to Jagan on 6 July his decision to

¹ State dept. to embassy, London, tel., 21 June 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 605-6.

² Bundy, memo for president, 'Subjects for Discussion with Wilson other than MLF', 6 Dec. 1964, Austin, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, National Security File, country file, box 214.

³ See briefing book, visit of Gordon Walker, 26-27 Oct. 1964, *Declassified Documents Quarterly Catalogue*, v, no. 4 (1979), State Department 451B; and memo, Davis to sec., 9 July 1965, *ibid.*, iii, no. 2 (1977), State Department 116B.

⁴ Memo of con., 30 June 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 604-5.

refuse aid to the PPP government. The decision was attributed to US disapproval of Jagan's willingness to seek ties with the 'communist world, including Cuba', and the futility of aid 'until the impasse in British Guiana's political and racial quarrels is solved'.¹

After the end of the strike in July, Sandys visited Georgetown to encourage Jagan and Burnham to discuss a coalition government. He was trying to ensure that Britain was not criticized for the political impasse it had caused prior to delivering the *coup de grâce* to Jagan. Upon his return, Sandys announced that he had given the PPP and PNC until October to reach an agreement; failing that, the British government would impose a solution.

By late September, the talks between the PPP and the PNC had failed, owing to the PNC's demand for proportional representation and the PPP's refusal to accept it. The PNC demanded an equal number of cabinet posts in a coalition government, despite its lower share of the popular vote, because of its perception that the PPP was vulnerable and certain it would refuse.² Jagan's own sense of the PPP's vulnerability may explain his meeting with Melby on 5 September to find a way to halt the deterioration in relations between his government and the United States. Rusk merely told Melby 'to avoid creating any impression, or enabling the PPP to do so, that there exists real possibility of improving relations'.³

The call on Kennedy in September by the Republican leadership in Congress to pressure the British into withholding independence from British Guiana was further ammunition for the anti-Jagan forces.⁴ It strengthened the administration's hand, because by showing that its stance had bipartisan support, it enabled Kennedy to prevent the Republicans from using British Guiana as an issue in the presidential election. By late 1963, the administration had used the Sandys plan to defuse the potentially explosive impact of British Guiana upon US domestic politics.

The failure of the talks between the PPP and the PNC led to new talks in London under Sandys scheduled for late October. During a stopover in New York on the way to London, Burnham and D'Aguiar said that the talks would only result in an imposed solution. When the talks deadlocked, they sent a joint letter to Sandys: 'We agreed to ask the British Government to settle on their authority all outstanding constitutional issues, and we undertake to accept their decisions.'⁵ Sandys' solution was a new constitution and proportional representation, elections, and independence

¹ 'Kennedy Refuses Aid to Guiana; Ties to Reds Termed Reason', *New York Times*, 9 July 1963.

² Melby to state dept., tel., 5 Sept. 1963, *FRUS*, 1961-3, xii. 610-11.

³ Rusk to Melby, tel., 7 Sept. 1963, *ibid.*

⁴ 'Republicans in Washington Fight Guiana Independence', *New York Times*, 27 Sept. 1963.

⁵ FO to mission, United Nations, tel., 25 Oct. 1963, FO 371/167689.

postponed until afterwards. His plan had finally borne its fruit. The ground was laid for the removal of Jagan by a constitutional process that would both save Britain from international opprobrium and achieve the Kennedy administration's objectives. Jagan, who accused Britain of subservience to the United States, declared the PPP free to reject Sandys' solution. He told the new prime minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, who had succeeded Macmillan in October, that: 'The Colonial Secretary has used divisions and differences in British Guiana as excuses for altering the constitution and rigging the election ... Mr Sandys' decision came as a shock. It is incomprehensible and unprincipled.'¹ Although Home supported Sandys, he later acknowledged that 'it had even been slightly awkward. Dr Jagan had given so little trouble.'²

The following year was marked by a return to sporadic violence in British Guiana as preparations were made for the elections. Jagan's efforts to mobilize support within the United Nations and the British Labour Party proved futile. In December 1964, the elections brought a PNC-UF coalition to power, which led the country to independence in May 1966 underpinned by the promise of substantial US aid.

* * *

British Guiana proved to be emblematic of the 'imperialism of decolonization'. In 1961, Britain was preparing to transfer power to the PPP government. By 1964, it had not only abandoned the PPP, it had also deferred to the Kennedy administration's demand to replace the PPP with a PNC-UF coalition and had ceded its control over events in the colony to the United States. Having shed the trappings of formal empire, the new country, Guyana, found its autonomy circumscribed as the New Frontier picked up where the British Empire left off. The United States was the critical determinant of both British policy and the post-imperial dispensation, and its influence expanded in the colony both *during* and *after* the transfer of power to the Guyanese nationalist movement.

British Guiana also illustrates the impact of British imperial disengagement upon domestic politics in the United States. In the wake of the Cuban revolution and the Cuban missile crisis, independence for British Guiana under the PPP might have triggered an outburst of anti-Communist hysteria that would have swept the Democratic administration from power in 1964. That fear of the consequences of Jagan's survival in British Guiana helps to explain the intense pressure brought to bear on the British

¹ Jagan to Macmillan, 7 Nov. 1963, FO 371/167689; 'Britain Demands Proportional Election in Guiana', *New York Times*, 1 Nov. 1963.

² Record of con. at embassy, Washington, 26 Nov. 1963, FO 371/167690.

government to ensure that a post-imperial dispensation in Guyana would accommodate US preferences, thus helping to contain the rabid anti-Communist hysteria within the United States. In effect, the Anglo-American relationship was, in the case of British Guiana, instrumental in the Kennedy administration's management of domestic US politics.

Louis and Robinson point to the importance of exploring the evolution of the Anglo-American relationship as a mechanism for analysing the process of British imperial disengagement after 1945, which transcends the focus on the conflict/collaboration among metropolitan and colonial/national interest groups, and shows how the boundaries of the informal empire of the United States were extended. The New Frontier pushed forwards as the British Empire fell back. Nowhere in the Caribbean was this illustrated more clearly than during the transfer of power in British Guiana.

Jagan's return to power in 1992, after an election overseen by the former president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, and an international team of observers, was a powerful commentary on the achievements of the New Frontier. With the end of the cold war, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the United States could find an accommodation with the 'Communist' political leadership in Guyana that it had sought to destroy three decades before, in its search for ideological conformity and the expansion of its informal empire in the Western Hemisphere.

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